

Message Text

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

UDORN 574 SENT ACTION BANGKOK AND CHIANG MAI DATED 230840Z
FEB 76 BEING REPEATED TO YOU FOR YOUR INFO:

C O N F I D E N T I A L UDORN 574

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, TH

SUBJECT: NORTHEAST ELECTIONS: "STURM UND DRANG" IN KORAT

SUMMARY: THE FIRST ELECTORAL DISTRICT IN KORAT IS ONE OF THE MORE INTERESTING RACES IN THE NORTHEAST. TWO OF THE LEADING CANDIDATS FOR THE THREE SEATS ARE FOREIGN MINISTER CHATICHAI CHOONHAVAN (THAI NATION) AND FORMER KORAT GOVERNOR WICHIT SUKHAWIRIYA (SOCIAL ACTION). ALSO CNTENDING ARE TWO CANDIDATES OF THE NEWLY FORMED THAI SOCIAL PARTY WHICH HAS STRONG BACKING AMONG THE MILITARY. DESPITE EVIDENCE OF CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THAI NATION AND SOCIAL ACTION (SAP), FISSURES IN THE ALLIANCE HAVE BEGUN TO APPEAR. END SUMMARY.

1. WITH ELEVEN SEATS IN PARLIAMENT, KORAT IS THE LARGEST CONSTITUENCY OUTSIDE OF BANGKOK. THE FIRST ELECTORAL DISTRICT IS THE MOST POPULOUS INCLUDING THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL AND THE MILITARY HEADQUARTERS (ARMY - 2ND RTA, CONFIDENTIAL

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AND AIR FORCE-WING III).

2. FOREIGN MINISTER CHATICHAI CHOONHAVAN ARRIVED BY HELICOPTER TO REGISTER FEB. 9 AND THEN FLEW OFF TO ATTEND THE ASEAN MEETINGS IN PATTAYA. HE IS COUNTING ON HIS NATIONAL PROMINENCE TO STAND HIM IN GOOD STEAD. THIS IS IN PART DUE TO THE FAILURE OF CHATICHAI'S PLANS TO BRING INDUSTRY TO KORAT TO OFFSET THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE CLOSURE OF THE AIRBASE. FOREMOST AMONG THESE ABORTIVE SCHEMES WAS A PLAN TO TURN THE BASE INTO AN AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE CENTER. DESPITE HIS BUSY SCHEDULE, CHATICHAI POPS IN AND OUT OF THE DISTRICT REGULARLY AND HAS PUT HIS OWN MONEY INTO LOCAL SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS.

3. PERHAPS THE MOST UNIQUE CANDIDACY IS THAT OF FORMER KORAT GOVERNOR WICHIT SUKHAWIRIYA. WICHIT RESIGNED HIS POST AS KORAT GOVERNOR IN LATE JANUARY. HE CONSIDERED RUNNING AS A THAI NATION CANDIDATE BUT SAYS HE ABANDONED THIS PLAN WHEN CHATICHAI "INSULTED" HIM BY OFFERING HIM 150,000 BAHT TO JOIN FORCES WITH HIM. (OTHER SOURCES IN KORAT INDICATE WICHIT'S CANDIDACY WAS NOT ORIGINALLY TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY CHATICHAI AND THIS CAUSED HIM TO SPLIT WITH THAI NATION). WICHIT CLAIMS THAT IN LATE JANUARY HE WAS SUMMONED TO BANGKOK TO MEET WITH THE PRIME MINISTER. KHUKRIT REPORTEDLY ASKED HIM TO RUN FOR SAP IN KORAT NOTING THAT HE WAS THE FIRST INCUMBENT GOVERNOR SAP HAD APPROACHED IN THIS WAY.

4. WICHIT IS CAMPAIGNING ON THE BASIS OF A GOOD RECORD AS GOVERNOR IN KORAT. HE IS QUICK TO CRITICIZE THE LAVISH SPENDING AND "DIRTY TRICKS" OF OTHER CANDIDATES. HE IS ALSO DRAWING ON THE LOYALTY OF DISTRICT AND PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS, MANY OF WHOM ARE CANVASSING FOR HIM. AS GOVERNOR, WICHIT FREQUENTLY TRAVELED TO THE DISTRICTS AND VILLAGES WHERE HE NOW CAMPAIGNS AND HIS FAMILIARITY WITH LOCAL PROBLEMS IS AN ASSET.

5. WICHIT TAKES CREDIT FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE TAMBON DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN KORAT AND GOES SO FAR AS TO SAY HE ORIGINALLY CONCEIVED THE PLAN SOME YEARS AGO AS DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN MOI. (ALL CONFIDENTIAL

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THE CANDIDATES WOULD LIKE TO CLAIM RESPONSIBILITY FOR LARGESSE DISPENSED TO VILLAGERS. THIS INCLUDES THAT INVOLVED IN THE US AIR FORCE CIVIC ACTION PROGRAM IN KORAT, NOW CONCLUDED. WICHIT, WHO LEGITIMATELY PRESIDED OVER A NUMBER OF CIVIC ACTION SCHOOL DEDICATIONS AS GOVERNOR, HAS A DECIDED ADVANTAGE HERE WHICH APPARENTLY IRKS THAI NATION CANVASSERS.)

6. THE NEWLY FORMED THAI SOCIAL PARTY WILL ONLY RUN

CANDIDATES IN THE NORTHEAST. TWO OF THEM, FORMER 2ND RTA CHIEF OF STAFF MAJ. GEN. CHAKCHAI SUPANGANGKESEN AND PARTY LEADER AND WEALTHY MERCHANT PHAITHUN RATTANASET WILL BOTH RUN IN THE FIRST DISTRICT. THEY COULD CUT INTO THE CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT CHATICHAI RECEIVED FROM THE MILITARY IN THE LAST ELECTITN. FORMER 2ND RTA COMMANDER LT. GEN. SAWAT MAKKERUN, EARLIER RUMORED TO BE THE HEAD OF THE THAI SOCIAL PARTY, SAID HE WOULD NOT RUN THIS TIME, BUT WAIT A YEAR OR SO BEFORE "PLAYING POLITICS". SAWAT SAID HE THOUGHT THAT WHEN AND IF GEN. KRIT SIVARA (ALSO A FORMER 2ND RTA COMMANDER) FORMALLY ENTERED POLITICS, HE WOULD RUN IN KORAT. SAWAT SAID KRIT MADE FREQUENT BUSINESS TRIPS TO KORAT AND WAS IN TOUCH WITH MANY LEADING CANDIDATES AND PARTY LEADERS THERE. (GEN. KRIT OWNS THE SRI PATTANA HOTEL IN KORAT, LONG A FAVORITE SPOT FOR GIS AND THEIR FRIENDS.)

7. DESPITE THE BUDDING RIVALRY BETWEEN CHATICHAI AND WICHIT, THERE IS EVIDENCE OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THAI NATION AND SAP IN KORAT. FOR EXAMPLE, CANDIDATES FROM BOTH PARTIES ARE PITTED AGAINST EACH OTHER IN SEVERAL KEY DISTRICTS BUT THE TOTAL NUMBER DOES NOT EXCEED THE NUMBER OF SEATS IN THE DISTRICT, I.E. IN THE FIRST DISTRICT (3 SEATS) THERE IS ONE SAP CANDIDATE AND TWO FROM THAI NATION. IN THE FOURTH (2 SEATS) EACH PARTY HAS ONE CANDIDATE. LOCAL POLITICOES NOTE THIS COOPERATION BUT PREDICT THAT AS ELECTION DAY APPROACHES IT WILL BECOME A FREE FOR ALL WITH VOTE BUYING THE NAME OF THE GAME. SEVERAL MAJOR CANDIDATES REPORTEDLY HAVE 1,000,000 BAHT IN RESERVE FOR THIS PURPOSE ON ELECTION DAY.

HAMILTON UNQUOTE
WHITEHOUSE

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